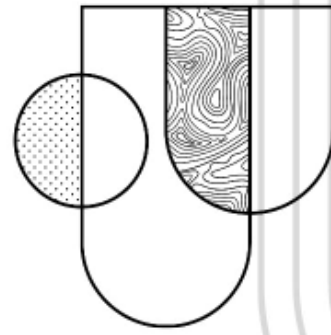


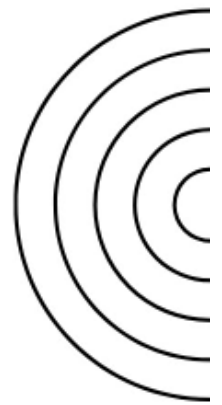


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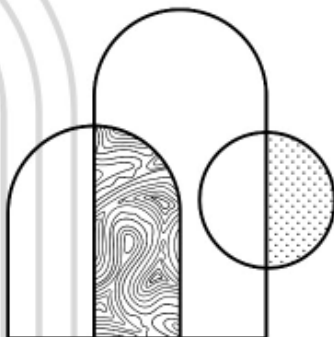
Nelson Mandela University: Faculty of
Education - Intermediate Phase

From Colonial Legacy to Humanising Practice: The role of the
Educator in addressing Equity, Access, and Inclusion in South
African Higher Education

Equity, Access, and Inclusion: Addressing systemic
inequalities, the digital divide, and diverse learning
needs



Paper Abstract



Abstract

From Colonial Legacy to Humanising Practice: The role of the Educator in addressing Equity, Access, and Inclusion in South African Higher Education.

Despite significant transformation efforts in post-apartheid South Africa, many students continue to experience barriers to equity, access and inclusion in higher education. These barriers are rooted in enduring colonial legacies that continue to shape curriculum relevance, language practices, resource distribution and student belonging. While curriculum transformation and decolonisation initiatives have sought to address these inequalities, a persistent gap remains between institutional policy commitments and student's lived experiences of the classroom.

This conceptual paper argues that decolonisation cannot be achieved through policy and curriculum reform alone; it must also be enacted through everyday pedagogical practice. Humanising pedagogy is proposed as the approach through which this enactment becomes possible. Drawing on its core principles which are dignity, dialogue, participation, learner voice, relationship-building and the co-construction of knowledge. The paper examines how educators create classroom conditions within which students exercise voice, assert agency and bring their lived experiences into the construction of knowledge. Students are positioned not as passive recipients of transformation but as active participants who, given the appropriate conditions, contribute their lived experiences and co-construct knowledge alongside educators. Transformation, in this framing, emerges through the relationship between educator practice and student participation, rather than through either acting alone.

The paper discusses practical approaches through which educators can create these enabling conditions: students gain more equitable footing when curriculum design and the recognition of diverse knowledge systems affirm rather than penalise their varied educational backgrounds; students gain meaningful access when resource-conscious course design and contextually relevant materials reduce the burden placed on them by assumptions of language proficiency, connectivity or prior exposure to academic conventions; and students experience inclusion when dialogic, relationship-centred practices invite their voice and affirm their belonging.

While educators alone cannot dismantle structural inequalities, their everyday pedagogical choices can open or close the space within which student agency and co-constructed knowledge become possible. Ultimately, it proposes that the decolonisation of the curriculum is realised not only through policy and curriculum reform, but through intentional teaching practices that enable students to see themselves, their experiences, and their knowledge reflected within higher education and this paper aims at equipping educators with practical ways to bridge the gap

between policy and practice.